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OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 9
OF THE CONVENTION

Fourteenth periodic reports of States parties due in 1996

Addendum

BELARUS*

* This document contains the fourteenth periodic report due on 8 May 1996. For the thirteenth periodic report of the Republic of Belarus and the summary records of the meetings at which the Committee considered that report, see documents CERD/C/263/Add.4 and CERD/C/SR.1101-1102, respectively.

The information submitted by the Republic of Belarus in accordance with the consolidated guidelines for the initial part of the reports of States parties is contained in the basic document (HRI/CORE/1/Add.70).

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Introduction

1. This is the fourteenth periodic report submitted by the Government of the Republic of Belarus on measures to implement the provisions of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. As recommended by the Committee, it has been prepared in the form of a short review of changes that have occurred in public and social life and in the nationalities policy of the independent State with regard to ensuring the free development of the ethnic, cultural, national, religious and linguistic communities living in the Republic, and of all citizens of the Republic, regardless of race, nationality, sex, education, social or property status, since the Committee considered the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth periodic reports of the Republic of Belarus at its 1101st and 1102nd meetings on 1 August 1995.

I. GENERAL

2. As a party to the Convention, the Republic of Belarus is keenly aware of the reprehensibility and injustice of discrimination against people on grounds of race, colour or ethnic origin and is taking purposeful action to realize one of the most important goals of the United Nations - the promotion and comprehensive development of universal respect for and observance of the rights and fundamental freedoms of citizens irrespective of race, nationality, sex, language or religion - and to ensure the freedom and equality before the law of all citizens of the Republic.

3. Law-making activities in the Republic of Belarus during the period of transition to democracy and a market economy are based on an understanding of the need to secure and promote human rights as a supreme social value and as a most important condition for preserving peace and stability.

II. DEMOGRAPHIC SITUATION

4. The Republic of Belarus is a multi-ethnic State in which there are representatives of more than 120 nationalities. The ethnic composition of the Republic (according to the data of post-war population censuses) is as follows:

	1959	1970	1979	1989
Total population (1 000)	8 055.7	9 002.3	9 532.5	1 015.8
of which:				
Belarusians	6 532.0	7 289.6	7 568.0	7 904.6
Russians	660.2	938.2	1 134.1	1 342.1
Poles	538.9	382.6	403.2	417.7
Ukrainians	133.1	190.8	231.0	291.0
Jews	150.1	148.0	135.4	112.0
Other nationalities	41.5	53.1	60.8	84.4

The inhabitants of Belarus also include (1 000)*:			
Tatars	13.0	Gypsies	11.0
Lithuanians	8.0	Azerbaijanis	5.0
Moldovans	5.0	Armenians	5.0
Uzbeks	3.5	Germans	3.5
Chuvash	3.0	Georgians	3.0
Latvians	2.7	Mordovans	2.6
Kazaks	2.3	Tajiks	0.9
Estonians	0.8	Turkmens	0.8

* According to the most recent (1989) population census.

A. National minorities

5. Representatives of the national minorities live in all parts of the Republic; only representatives of the Polish and Lithuanian nationalities are concentrated in particular areas.

6. To date there has been a marked tendency for the share of minorities in the ethnic composition of Belarus to increase.

7. In describing the situation of national, cultural, religious and linguistic minorities in the Republic of Belarus, it is essential to note its stability and uniqueness, as reflected in the absence of serious confrontations on ethnic or religious grounds, and in the harmony and unity of the ethnic groups and denominations making up society. Goodwill and tolerance have always been the most characteristic features of the Belarusian people.

8. Since Belarus became an independent State, together with the rebirth of the Belarusian nation there has begun an active revival of the political, cultural and spiritual life of the ethnic minorities and a striving on their part for national self-awareness and self-expression. This has been facilitated to a large extent by successful implementation of the Act on National Minorities in the Republic of Belarus, which was adopted on 11 November 1992 and whose basic provisions fully conform to international rules and standards concerning relations between nationalities. Article 5 of this Act guarantees all Belarusian citizens who regard themselves as belonging to a national, cultural, linguistic or religious minority the right to receive assistance from the State in the development of their national culture and education; the right to study and use their native language; the right to publish and disseminate information in their native language; the right to establish cultural ties with their compatriots outside the Republic; the right to profess any religion and to perform national and ritual ceremonies in their native language; the right to preserve their national traditions and to develop professional and amateur arts; the right to establish their own national cultural societies or associations; the right to be elected to the organs of State of the Republic of Belarus on the basis of universal, equal and direct suffrage; and the right to hold any office in the organs of State and government of the Republic of Belarus.

9. Not only the legislative, but also the social and psychological conditions have been formed in the Republic for the all-round development of ethnic minorities.

10. More than 10 national cultural associations of Russians, Poles, Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Jews, Germans, Koreans, Azerbaijanis, Tatars and Moldovans living in the Republic of Belarus have been established and have been pursuing their activities since 1991.

11. Reaffirming its commitment to the observance of international human rights standards and its desire to promote international cooperation regarding the observance of the rights of national minorities, the Republic of Belarus on 21 October 1994 signed the Convention of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) concerning the rights of persons belonging to national minorities, many of whose provisions echo those of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. The Convention guarantees the civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights and freedoms of persons belonging to national minorities in accordance with generally recognized international human rights standards. Under article 3 of this Convention, the Republic of Belarus has made the undertaking not to allow in its territory any discrimination against citizens on account of their membership of a national minority; it recognizes the right of such persons individually or together with other members of their community to express, preserve and develop their own ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious identity without hindrance (art. 4), creates favourable conditions for this, and grants national minorities the right to participate in State and public life, and particularly in addressing matters relating to the protection of their interests at the regional level.

B. Migration situation

12. In the early 1990s, as a result of certain political, economic and social developments connected with the transition of the former Soviet republics and countries of Eastern Europe to democracy and a market economy system, Belarus became confronted with a problem of mass migration. The Republic remains, as before, a sort of crossroads for migration flows. The "transparency" of its eastern and southern borders is allowing a massive and uncontrolled inflow of illegal immigrants from countries of the CIS, Asia, Africa and the Near and Middle East heading for Western Europe. According to rough estimates, their number is in excess of 100,000. Asylum is being sought in the Republic by more than 4,000 people from Afghanistan, Ethiopia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Pakistan, Bolivia, China and Somalia, as well as about 1,000 former immigrant workers from Viet Nam, who do not wish to return to their home country. The State migration service of the Republic of Belarus has registered about 30,000 persons claiming refugee status. These developments are having a negative impact on the socioeconomic situation in the Republic, and to some extent also affect relations between nationalities.

13. Under these circumstances, the Republic is further improving its migration laws. Efforts are being made to conclude bilateral agreements with contiguous States to regulate migratory movements. In particular, agreements

have been concluded within the CIS framework on assistance to refugees and displaced persons. The CIS Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms has been adopted and approval given to a decision to set up an inter-State fund to aid refugees and displaced persons.

14. The Republic of Belarus advocates closer bilateral and multilateral cooperation to regulate migratory flows. In this connection, it sponsored and took a most active part in the preparation and discussion of the Programme of Action and Priorities of the CIS countries in the field of migration, refugees, involuntarily displaced persons and returnees - the basic documents adopted by the Regional Conference to address the problems of refugees, displaced persons, other forms of involuntary displacement and returnees in the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States and relevant neighbouring states (CISCONF), held at Geneva on 30 and 31 May 1996. The Conference was a positive contribution by the international community and CIS countries, including Belarus, to alleviating the region's migration problems, supporting peace and security, and encouraging and further developing the rights and fundamental freedoms of citizens regardless of their race, nationality, sex, language or attitude towards religion.

15. The Republic's highest legislative body is now considering a bill on immigration, whose passage will make it possible to carry out immigration controls in a more orderly and civilized manner and provide effective assistance to people - regardless of race, colour or nationality - who find themselves in the Republic's territory.

16. Evidence of the due attention given by the Belarusian Government to the problems of people who have been brought by a whim of fate to the Republic and who are seeking refuge in it, is provided by the adoption of the Act on Refugees of 22 February 1995. This Act, in accordance with the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus and the generally recognized principles of international law, defines the legal status of refugees, regulates the procedure for its acquisition or loss and sets forth the legal, economic and social guarantees of protection afforded to refugees in Belarus.

17. Article 1 of the Act defines a refugee as a person "who is not a citizen of the Republic of Belarus and has arrived in its territory, having been forced to leave the State of his citizenship or of his former habitual residence (for stateless persons) owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, citizenship, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, and who is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to avail himself of the protection of the State of his citizenship or of his former habitual residence"; i.e. the wording fully corresponds to that of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.

18. Under article 8 of the same Act, the Republic of Belarus, guided by the principles of humanism and protection of the rights and fundamental freedoms of citizens regardless of their national or ethnic origin, has undertaken not to expel any alien against his will after registration of his application for recognition as a refugee to the State he was forced to leave on the conditions provided for in article 1 of this Act, pending a final decision on his application.

III. MEASURES TO IMPROVE NATIONAL LEGISLATION IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE PROVISIONS OF THE CONVENTION

19. The changes which have been taking place in recent years in the State and public life of the Republic are also having a beneficial influence on the substance of the nationalities policy, which is aimed at creating favourable conditions for the all-round and harmonious development of all national communities living in the independent State.

20. A key goal of the Republic of Belarus during the transitional period in the field of the promotion and protection of the rights and fundamental freedoms of citizens, regardless of their race, nationality, sex or religion, is to improve the national legislation and bring it into conformity with generally recognized international rules and standards. The new legislative acts adopted in recent years have formed the necessary legal framework for the practical realization of the highest aims and goals regarding the protection and promotion of human rights, as set forth in the main United Nations instruments, including the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Fully supporting the provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights concerning the freedom and equality in dignity and rights of all human beings regardless of race, colour or national origin, the Republic of Belarus guarantees all citizens living in its territory equal political, social, economic, civil and cultural rights and freedoms.

21. Thus, article 2 of the Act on Elections of the President of the Republic of Belarus, dated 29 March 1994, stipulates that "all direct or indirect restrictions of the electoral rights of citizens of the Republic of Belarus on account of origin, social or property status, race, nationality, sex, education, language, attitude towards religion, political views or type and nature of occupation are prohibited".

22. The Act on the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus, dated 30 January 1995 (art. 9) defines the powers of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus in regard to ensuring law and order. It states that the Cabinet of Ministers must ensure the rights and freedoms of citizens guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic and provided for in the State's international obligations, including protection of the individual from any unlawful acts or attacks on his life, property or human dignity, as well as provide State protection for the citizen both within and outside the territory of the Republic of Belarus. Under article 6 of this Act, the Cabinet of Ministers must "carry out State policy regarding the preservation and development of the State language and the creation of suitable conditions for the development of the languages of other peoples living in the territory of the Republic of Belarus".

23. One of the bodies having the right to initiate legislation, inter alia, on matters relating to the protection of all segments of the population from any manifestations of racial discrimination, is the Supreme Council of the Republic of Belarus. Thus, the Act on the Supreme Council of the Republic of Belarus, dated 21 December 1994, calls for the Supreme Council by legislative means to regulate relations between social, national and other communities on the basis of equality before the law and respect for their rights and interests (art. 3).

24. The Act on the Press and Other Mass Media of 13 January 1995 contains a provision forbidding the use of the mass media for the instigation of national, social, racial or religious intolerance or discord.

25. On 26 May 1995, within the framework of the CIS, the Republic of Belarus signed an all-embracing human rights instrument known as the CIS Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. Article 20 of the Convention states that all people are equal before the law and have the right to equal protection of the law without discrimination of any kind. Enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in this Convention are guaranteed without discrimination on any grounds such as sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other convictions, national or social origin, membership of a national minority, property or official status, place of birth or other circumstance.

26. The Act on Political Parties, adopted on 5 October 1994, states that a citizen's membership or non-membership of a political party may not serve as a ground for restriction of his rights and freedoms (art. 3, prohibition of any restriction of the rights and freedoms of citizens in connection with their membership of political parties). Article 6 of the same Act (restrictions concerning the establishment and activities of political parties) "prohibits the establishment and activities of political parties whose aim is to change the constitutional system by force or which carry out propaganda for war or national, religious or racial enmity".

27. Provisions on prohibiting all forms of discrimination and ensuring the equal rights of citizens regardless of nationality or race have been incorporated in the Act on the Principles of Service in the State Administration of 23 November 1993. Thus, article 7 of this Act (right to serve in the State administration) states that "citizens of the Republic of Belarus have the right to serve in the State administration, regardless of social or property status, race, nationality, sex, attitude towards religion or political opinions".

28. Similar measures are also incorporated in the Act on Trade Unions, dated 22 April 1992, of which article 2 (right of association in trade unions) states that "citizens ... without distinction whatsoever have the right voluntarily to form trade unions as they choose and without prior authorization".

29. Provisions on the equal rights of all foreign citizens and stateless persons, in the Republic of Belarus, regardless of race, colour or national origin, are embodied in the Act on the Legal Status of Foreign Citizens and Stateless Persons, adopted on 3 June 1993, article 3 of which reads: "Foreign citizens and stateless persons in the Republic of Belarus shall enjoy the same rights and freedoms and shall fulfil the same obligations as citizens of the Republic of Belarus. Foreign citizens and stateless persons in the Republic of Belarus are equal before the law regardless of origin, social or property status, race, nationality, sex, education, language, attitude towards religion, type and nature of occupation or other circumstances".

30. The economic rights of national minorities, foreign citizens and stateless persons are reflected in the Act on Entrepreneurship, dated 28 May 1991, of which article 2 (entrepreneurs) states that "entrepreneurs are natural persons who are not restricted in rights under the procedure defined by the legislative acts of the Republic of Belarus, including foreign citizens and stateless persons within the bounds of the rights and obligations provided for by the current legislation".

Conformity of national legislation with article 4 (a), (b) and (c) of the Convention

31. Organized and all other propaganda activities which promote and incite racial discrimination in the territory of the Republic of Belarus are treated as an offence punishable under article 71 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus ("Violation of national and racial equality and of the equal rights of citizens on account of their attitude towards religion").

32. Article 3 (restrictions concerning the establishment and activities of public associations) of the Act on Public Associations, dated 4 October 1994, disallows "the establishment of public associations whose activities are aimed at the overthrow or forcible change of the constitutional system, violation of the integrity and security of the State, propaganda for war or violence or the instigation of national, religious or racial enmity". A similar provision is contained in article 6, paragraph 2 (restrictions concerning the establishment and activities of political parties) of the Act on Political Parties of 5 October 1994.

33. The Act on the Press and Other Mass Media of 13 January 1995 disallows the use of the mass media for "the instigation of national, social, racial or religious intolerance or discord" (art. 5, para. 5). Furthermore, repeated breaches in the course of a year by editorial staff of the requirements of article 5 of this Act provides grounds for a court to suspend the activities of mass media (art. 16), and also give rise to disciplinary, administrative or criminal liability under the legislation of the Republic of Belarus (art. 49).

34. With regard to article 4 (c) of the Convention, it should be pointed out that the legislation of the Republic of Belarus does not directly prohibit national or local public authorities or public institutions from promoting or inciting racial discrimination. However, under article 3 of the Act on Local Government and Self-Government in the Republic of Belarus, as amended on 20 February 1995, one of the fundamental principles of local government and self-government is that of "lawfulness, social justice and humanism", which in itself presupposes the prohibition of all forms of racial discrimination. Furthermore, decisions of local councils of deputies and of executive or administrative bodies which restrict or violate the rights, freedoms and legitimate interests of citizens may be appealed by natural or juridical persons to the courts under the procedure established by law (art. 42, para. 3, of the Act).

35. There have been no recorded instances of criminal proceedings being brought in the Republic during the reporting period under article 71 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus, which establishes responsibility for

actions aimed at the instigation of national or racial enmity or discord, at the derogation of national honour and dignity, or direct or indirect restriction of the rights of citizens or the establishment of direct or indirect privileges for them on account of their race or nationality.

IV. PRACTICAL STEPS TO GIVE EFFECT TO THE PROVISIONS OF THE CONVENTION

36. The Republic of Belarus condemns racial discrimination and is taking specific steps to apply in practice the legislative acts which have been adopted with a view to ensuring the rights and freedoms of citizens regardless of race, sex, language or religion.

37. A key challenge in promoting and protecting human rights and enhancing the process of democracy is to bring the national legislation into conformity with international rules and standards. In this connection, the Republic of Belarus is devoting very considerable attention to broadening international cooperation with United Nations bodies and agencies and with other international organizations. At the request of the Republic of Belarus, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees carried out an expert appraisal of the Republic's Act on Refugees, adopted on 22 February 1995, and this has confirmed that the main provisions of the Act are consistent with the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.

38. The Republic of Belarus has established close cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for the implementation of a project entitled "Democracy, public administration and participation". The measures being carried out under this programme were formulated in the light of an objective analysis of social, political and legal developments and are aimed at accomplishing the most important goals in the area of the promotion and protection of human rights, at further harmonizing the national legislation with generally recognized international rules and at creating favourable conditions for the all-round development of the human person irrespective of race, nationality, sex, language or religion. The programme envisages a range of measures to improve the work of and provide training for certain key groups of professionals (jurists, law-enforcement officials and administrators, teachers and educators) who are likely to have a particular impact on the situation of human rights in society.

39. Progressive implementation of this project is affording greater means for State and public bodies in the Republic to protect citizens' basic rights and freedoms, shape public opinion and develop effective channels of communication between State and public organizations for the prevention of conflict situations and the peaceful settlement of any differences that may arise.

40. The Supreme Council of the Republic of Belarus is considering the need to establish an office of ombudsman charged with protecting the rights of private individuals, including representatives of minorities, who believe they are victims of unjust actions or discrimination on the part of the public administration.

41. The particular attention given by the Belarusian Government to the problems of national minorities is confirmed by the establishment on 18 January 1995 of a Coordinating Council for National Minorities attached to the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus and headed by a deputy prime minister. The Council includes representatives of various ministries and other central authorities, and leaders of national associations. Its main tasks are to coordinate the activities of State bodies and social organizations concerning relations among nationalities and to achieve the optimal harmonization of general State interests and the interests of the national minorities. The work of the Council involves helping to preserve and develop the culture of national minorities, to encourage cultural exchanges between them and on that basis establish a high standard of inter-ethnic relations; studying and analysing public opinion concerning relations among the nationalities and taking account of the interests and needs of national minorities in the work of the organs of State and government; promoting and strengthening the Republic's ties with the States that are the historical home countries for its national minorities; and organizing and carrying out events of an inter-ethnic character.

42. In 1995 the Coordinating Council examined the following questions: satisfaction of the educational needs of the national minorities and of their requirements in the cultural field; the practice of the local authorities working with national cultural associations of national minorities in the city of Minsk and the Grodno region; the formulation of a State outline plan for the national cultural development of the national minorities of the Republic of Belarus; the holding of a scientific and practical conference on the problems of national minorities; the holding of the first festival of national cultures; ad hoc funding of programmes for the national cultural development of national minorities at republican and local levels; the work of the Centre for National Cultures; and the allocation of premises for the national cultural associations of national minorities.

A. Implementation of article 6 of the Convention

43. Effective protection of the citizens of the Republic of Belarus from any acts of racial discrimination is provided through the courts which, under article 3 (functions of judges) of the Act on the Judicial System and the Status of Judges in the Republic of Belarus, adopted on 13 January 1995, "are required to protect from infringement the individual rights and freedoms and social, economic and political rights of citizens guaranteed by the Constitution and legislation of the Republic of Belarus". The equality of all citizens before the law and the courts, regardless of origin, social, official or property status, race, nationality, political or other convictions, attitude towards religion, sex, education, language, type and nature of occupation, place of residence or other circumstances, is guaranteed by article 5 (equality of citizens before the law and the courts) of this Act. Article 6 (right of citizens to protection of the courts) ensures the right of citizens of Belarus to protection of the courts from attacks on life and health, honour and dignity, personal freedom and property, and the other rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus and the current legislation, as well as from unlawful acts by State administrative bodies and officials. Foreign citizens and stateless persons

are guaranteed, in the territory of the Republic of Belarus, the right to apply to the courts for protection of their personal, property, family and other rights in accordance with the current legislation.

B. Education and teaching

44. The Republic of Belarus has established general compulsory standards of education which set the level of the requirements for graduates from various kinds of educational institution.

45. Issues concerning relations among nations and racial or ethnic groups are reflected in school curricula and teacher-training programmes.

46. As part of the curricula, pupils are informed about the culture and historical traditions of all the peoples living in the Republic and acquaint themselves with the rights and fundamental freedoms of citizens regardless of their ethnic origin.

47. In the education and teaching process, account is taken of and explanations given to pupils concerning the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and other such instruments.

48. Provision for the educational requirements of citizens of the Republic of Belarus who regard themselves as belonging to national minorities is regulated by law in the Act on Education in the Republic of Belarus of 29 October 1991 (arts. 5-6), the Act on Languages in the Republic of Belarus of 26 January 1990 (arts. 22-25), the Act on Culture in the Republic of Belarus of 4 June 1991 (art. 10), the Act on National Minorities in the Republic of Belarus of 11 November 1992 (arts. 3 and 5) and the Act on the Rights of the Child of 19 November 1993 (art. 19).

49. The ministerial regulations and standard-setting instruments which are being adopted in the field of education and science in the process of reform of the general education system and on the basis of the above-mentioned Acts, taking into account the results of the national referendum held on 14 May 1995, ensure compliance with the provisions of the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Their aim is to shape and build national awareness among citizens of the Republic of Belarus and to develop a sense of respect for the representatives of other countries and peoples of the world.

50. The teaching staff in educational institutions and the public education authorities are engaged in considerable organizational and methodological work to establish favourable conditions for meeting the educational needs of representatives of national minorities.

51. On 1 March 1996 a Ministry of Education and Science board considered and passed a decision on the topic "Satisfying the educational needs of national

minorities in the Republic of Belarus". Every year the Nastaunitskaya gazeta (teachers' newspaper) publishes ministerial instructions elucidating questions relating to this matter.

52. In the 1995/96 school year, out of a total of approximately 5,000 general-education day schools (over 1.5 million pupils), languages of national minorities are being taught in 330 schools catering for more than 15,000 pupils where the language is studied as an optional subject in study circles and other forms of instruction. There is a network of Sunday schools and schools run by Polish Roman Catholic churches, synagogues and mosques, where languages of national minorities are studied together with the history and geography of the country of ethnic origin, as well as the traditions and culture of the peoples concerned.

53. The Russian language, in accordance with the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus, is used in relations among nationalities, and this accounts for its particular status in the country's general education system. The study of Russian is compulsory in all general education schools. Since 1995, in the entrance examinations for institutions of higher education, candidates have been able to choose either Belarusian language and literature or Russian language and literature.

54. Polish is taught mainly by teachers undergoing progressive training in Polish philology in institutes for advanced studies and in the Republic of Poland (Bialystock, Warsaw and Lublin - about 150 persons annually). In cooperation with the teachers' centre in Lublin, advanced courses are organized during school holidays by the Minsk republican institute for skills improvement and training of key personnel and specialists in education, and also by the Grodno regional institute for the improvement of teachers' skills.

55. Classes with Polish as the language of instruction are normally entrusted to teachers from the Republic of Poland who have been invited by the Ministry of Education and Science on the basis of the agreement on cooperation between the Ministry of Public Education of the Republic of Poland and the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Belarus for the period 1994-1995. Teachers of Polish language and literature are trained at Grodno State University and at the Volkovysk and Grodno teacher training colleges. Polish as a second foreign language is also studied at the Belarusian State University in the department of Slavonic philology and at the history faculty in the Belarusian Language University; the Polish language is a subject studied at the Belarusian Pedagogical University and at the Brest Pedagogical University.

56. Ukrainian is studied at two schools in the Brest region; the Tatar cultural and educational association "al-Kitab" is very active in arranging for the study of Crimean Tatar and Arabic.

57. Lithuanian language and literature is studied by pupils in five schools of the Grodno region. In the village of Pelyasy, in the Voronovo district, a basic school has opened to provide teaching of all subjects in Lithuanian. In the village of Rimdyuny, in the Ostrovets district, the Lithuanian cultural

and educational centre runs a primary school and a kindergarten with Lithuanian as the language of instruction and education. These schools teach the history of Lithuania and the history of Lithuanian culture.

58. In Minsk, at secondary school No. 132, there is a school for the Jewish minority where 225 children are studying in the 1995/96 school year. Besides modern Hebrew, under the guidance of teachers from Israel pupils study, as a subject, the traditions of the Jewish people and the history and geography of Israel.

59. In Vitebsk, the consulate of Latvia runs a Sunday school for the study of Latvian.

60. There are at present 16 Sunday schools in Belarus where public education is provided to more than 1,500 children.

61. With the entry into force of the Act on the Rights of the Child and in accordance with a national plan of action for the protection of children's rights covering the period 1996-2000, as approved by decree of the President in April 1995, the Republic of Belarus has undertaken a number of measures reflecting the provisions of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

62. Specific steps to implement the National Plan of Action for the protection of the rights of the child in the education system include:

(a) Reflection of the main ideas and rules of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in the content and process of teaching at general education and vocational training schools, especially in the humanities and social sciences;

(b) Adoption of a number of instruments providing a legal framework for the regulations of the national adoption centre and regulations on the integrated teaching of children with special psychophysical needs in general education schools;

(c) Establishment of a network of diagnostic and rehabilitation centres for disabled children, children and pupils living in radiation-contaminated areas and children with special psychophysical needs;

(d) Formulation of a government "Child health" programme.

63. A special "Rights of the child" course has been introduced at all teaching and educational institutions, and a programme has been drawn up for the training of teaching and legal staff at higher and special secondary educational establishments and at institutes for retraining of staff in the education sector.

64. The State inspectorate of teaching institutions and all departments of the Ministry of Education and Science have been assigned the task of analysing progress made in studying and implementing the provisions of the Act on the Rights of the Child in educational institutions.

65. Departments of the Ministry of Education and Science, the Belarusian fund for social support of children and adolescents and a number of interested organizations and institutions, in pursuance of the ideas of the Convention and of the legislative and normative acts issued by the State, have decided to hold another republican scientific and practical conference in 1996 on the topic "Humanistic formation of the child's personality within the family, society and the State", the aims of which are to evaluate progress in applying State enactments, to define the necessary conditions and measures required of the State, society and the family to implement the Act on the Rights of the Child and to focus the attention of the mass media, State institutions and public organizations on issues relating to the development of the child.

C. Culture and religion

66. In its cultural activities in implementation of the provisions of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Belarusian Government is guided by the Act on Culture in the Republic of Belarus (4 July 1991) and the Act on Languages in the Republic of Belarus (26 January 1990). These reflect the changes in the substance of the nationalities policy which have occurred as a result of developments in the State and public life of Belarus in recent years.

67. With a view to fostering inter-ethnic and intercultural understanding, tolerance and friendship among nations and peoples, in 1995-1996 the Ministry of Culture and the Press of the Republic of Belarus signed protocols and agreements on cooperation in the field of culture with the Ministry of Culture and Art of the Republic of Poland (25 March 1995), the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation (24 April 1995), the Ministry of Culture of Ukraine (26 February 1995), the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Moldova (13 September 1995), the Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China (14 December 1995) and the Ministry of Culture of the Azerbaijani Republic (6 March 1996), as well as the protocol of the session of the Belarusian-German Mixed Commission on Cultural Cooperation (10 November 1995). All these agreements contain articles whereby the parties undertake to create favourable conditions for cultural cooperation, to combine their efforts with a view to broadening reciprocal exchange of the achievements of culture and to manifest concern for the cultural identity of the peoples, nations and nationalities living in their territories.

68. A number of intergovernmental agreements have been drawn up and signed:

(a) Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Belarus and the Government of the Republic of Poland on cooperation in the field of culture, science and education (27 November 1995);

(b) Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Belarus and the Government of the Russian Federation on cooperation in the field of culture, science and education (21 February 1995);

(c) Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Belarus and the Government of the Republic of Turkey on cooperation in the field of education, science, culture and sport (8 August 1995);

(d) Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation in the field of culture, science, education, sport and tourism between the Government of the Republic of Belarus and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran (14 July 1995);

(e) Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Belarus and the Government of the Republic of Kazakstan on cooperation in the field of culture, science and education (17 January 1996);

(f) Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Belarus and the Government of Romania on cooperation in the field of science, culture, education, information, health care, sport and tourism (7 May 1995). These documents reflect the undertakings of the parties in regard to the development of the cultures of peoples living in their territories and guarantees of their equal rights to take part in cultural life.

69. A Centre for National Cultures, with the status of a republican State cultural institution, has been active in Minsk since 1994. Together with national societies, the Centre organizes scientific and practical conferences on national cultural issues, archaeographic expeditions to areas where national minorities are concentrated, seminars for directors of cultural bodies and institutions on issues of interaction between national societies and State cultural institutions. The first republican festival of national cultures is being held in Belarus in 1995-1996.

70. Recent years have witnessed a substantial increase in the activities of social groupings of national minorities and a striving to acquire a certain cultural autonomy.

71. The State institutions responsible for culture and the arts are assisting national and cultural societies in the organization of their educational activities. National amateur artists' groups work in association with the cultural institutions. They jointly organize national festivals of folk art and cinema and exhibitions of graphic art. Theatres stage plays in national languages.

72. With a view to enhancing mutual understanding in the field of culture and the interaction of national, regional and ethnic cultures, an outline plan is being formulated to develop the cultures of the national minorities of Belarus and preparations are being made for an international conference on this topic.

73. The new conditions for the development of Belarusian statehood and the striving for spiritual renewal are contributing to an intensification of the activities of religious organizations. Having embarked on laying the foundation for a Belarusian secular society, the State is endeavouring to make carefully balanced arrangements for a system integrating the Church and religion and to seek new forms of religious policy that would satisfy all segments of the population regardless of nationality, race, sex or language. State policy concerning religion is based on the equal rights of all religions, churches and associations, and non-interference by the authorities and social movements in the internal affairs of religious organizations.

74. At present Belarus has 1,952 religious communities of 26 denominations, among which 918 are Orthodox, 360 Roman Catholic, 31 Old Believer, 11 Greek Catholic, 586 Protestant, 15 Jewish and 20 Islamic. (For purposes of comparison, in 1988 Belarus had 793 religious organizations belonging to 8 denominations.) There are 68 religious associations, centres, boards and unions; 7 religious teaching institutions (Orthodox and Catholic seminaries, a Bible institute, etc.) and 10 monasteries (8 Orthodox and 2 Catholic) have been registered.

75. Guided by the relevant international conventions and the Act on Freedom of Religion and Religious Organizations of 17 December 1992, the Government of the Republic of Belarus in August 1995 concluded an agreement with the exarchate of the Belarusian Orthodox Church, the purpose of which is the revival of the tradition of harmony between moral or ethical and rationalist education, and recognition of the fundamental importance of applying in Belarus the traditional European principle of the differentiated status of religions, denominations and doctrines in view of their relation to culture as a whole and to State educational programmes in particular.

D. Health care

76. The Act on Health Care of 18 June 1993 stipulates that all citizens of the Republic, regardless of race, nationality, sex, language or religion, have the right to health care. This right is ensured through:

(a) Free medical care in State health institutions;

(b) Consolidation of the material and technical resources of health institutions;

(c) Training of medical and pharmaceutical staff;

(d) Creation of a favourable human environment;

(e) Availability of medical, therapeutic, prophylactic and restorative facilities;

(f) Creation of conditions for the practice of physical education and sport.

77. Every citizen has the right to choose freely his own doctor and health-care institution (art. 4).

78. Persons under investigation or in places of confinement are also guaranteed necessary medical care (art. 6).

79. The Act states than no one may be compelled to undergo medical examination, investigation or in-patient or out-patient treatment except in the cases specifically prescribed by the legislation in force.

80. Section 5 of the Act sets out the rules for medical care of patients who constitute a danger to society. Compulsory medical certification of such persons is carried out by decision of the health institutions with the agreement of a procurator, and compulsory hospitalization and treatment by decision of a court under the procedure established by the legislative acts of the Republic of Belarus.

81. Persons who are HIV-positive or suffering from AIDS cannot be subjected, on that ground, to discrimination of any kind.

82. Belarus has drafted a bill on psychiatric care, regulations on psychiatric hospitals or wards with intensive supervision, instructions on the procedure for applying coercive or other measures of a medical character to persons with mental disorders who have committed acts constituting a danger to society, and instructions on the performance of forensic psychiatric examinations in the Republic of Belarus.

E. Mass media

83. Coverage of issues concerning national minorities in Belarusian periodicals and books is regulated by the legislation of the Republic of Belarus: the Constitution, the Declaration on State Sovereignty and the Act on the Press and Other Mass Media. In their activities the print media are governed by the principles of the Free Press Charter, international law relating to nationalities policies and the Act on National Minorities in the Republic of Belarus.

84. The representatives of all nationalities have unrestricted access to information. They are entitled to set up their own newspapers, magazines and publishing houses, and to obtain licenses for such activities. Thus, as of 1 April 1996, the State Committee on the Press had registered 897 periodicals; 139 of them appear in Belarusian, 170 in Belarusian and Russian, 40 in Belarusian and other languages, 115 in Russian and other languages, 3 in Polish, 2 in Ukrainian and other languages, and 1 in English.

85. The publishing centres which have been founded by associations of national minorities discuss the problems of their national cultural associations in six newspapers and magazines, as well as in books. The press of the Union of Poles in Belarus has been authorized to produce the newspaper Glos znad Niemna, which has 75 per cent funding from the State budget, and there are two private newspapers in Polish - Ziemia Lidzka and Cudowna Podroz. Issues concerning the Jewish communities in Belarus are covered by the newspaper Aviv Hadash (New Spring) and a publication of the Gomel Jewish association entitled Edinstvo-Ahdut. In Ukrainian there is a newspaper called Golos Beresteishchiny.

86. The life of the social and cultural associations of the national minorities is reflected in the Republic's leading newspapers; since January 1996 the Respublika newspaper has contained a monthly feature page entitled "Commonwealth".

87. At the request of representatives of the national minorities, the plan for publication of socially relevant literature by State publishing houses under the State Committee on the Press includes the pamphlets and books of various ethnic groups living in Belarus.

88. With a view to improving the system for informing the public about the activities of the sociocultural associations, round-table discussions, press conferences and other events are held with the participation of directors of State institutions and social organizations and representatives of the mass media.